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Briefing must be secret, panel told

WASHINGTON (UPI) — A Justice Department official offered yesterday to give a House panel a secret briefing on why the administration tightened procedures for handling of classified information by government workers.

The offer by Richard Willard, deputy assistant attorney general, came in response to complaints that no justification has been given for President Reagan's directive, issued last month.

Willard said he would give the information to the panel in closed session because classified information is involved.

The directive requires government employees to cooperate with federal agents investigating leaks of classified information.

The directive says that workers who refuse to take polygraph tests can be punished. It also requires more employees to sign secrecy agreements and pledges that they will submit manuscripts for government review before they are published.

The administration said the rule is necessary because unauthorized disclosure of classified information is a common occurrence.

Willard acted in response to a challenge by Rep. Don Edwards of California, chairman of the Judiciary subcommittee on constitutional rights, who asked, "Aren't you asking the American people to take this on faith?"